

3 October 1981

The Germanies

Call that a fair bargain?

FROM OUR BONN CORRESPONDENT

East Germany's most famous spy, Günter Guillaume, whose arrest in 1974 brought about the resignation of the then West German chancellor, Mr Willy Brandt, was released from prison this week to await his early transfer home. He had been sitting on his suitcase since the beginning of September, and on Thursday was in a hospital in Bonn (he is a sick man); his departure had been delayed while arrangements were being completed for what looks like the most complicated—and in some respects the most questionable—spy swap of all time. Guillaume, sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment for treason in 1975, is the centre-piece of a deal which not only involves the exchange of East Germans for West Germans (a not unusual occurrence) but also stipulates the release of some communist spies held in other countries.

The package was not exactly tied up in secret. Somebody who evidently didn't like the look of it leaked its contents to the Springer press, which is not well disposed towards Mr Helmut Schmidt's government, and thereby made delicate multilateral negotiations trickier still. The East Germans appear to be striking a hard bargain. From the West Germans they would secure the release of Guillaume—pardoned by President Carstens on September 28th—and of Renate Lutze, a former secretary in the West German defence ministry, who was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for spying in 1979. In addition they are asking France to set free an East German general arrested in Lille last year, the South Africans to hand over a KGB officer in their custody, and the Danes to pardon a convicted agent of the East German ministry of state security.

For their part, the East Germans would send home about 30 West German prisoners, some of whom are agents of the Bundesnachrichtendienst, the West German intelligence organisation: in short, our spies. The East German government is also said to be prepared to allow some 3,000 of its people to leave the country to join their families in the west, probably in return for a hefty payment in cash by the West German government. Such family reunions have been "bought" in this way before, al-

though it is a flagrant violation of the 1975 Helsinki agreement for the East Germans to operate this trade in human beings wishing to move from east to west.

And what's in the deal for the French, the South Africans and the Danes? The West Germans are said to be co-ordinating the exchange negotiations, which implies that they could be leaning on these three countries to give way. This new dimension in the game of spy-swapping could create a dangerous precedent.

None of the West German agents who should shortly be leaving East German prisons is likely to be of the calibre of Guillaume and Lutze. Mr Guillaume and his wife, Christel, came to West Germany from East Germany in the mid-1950s, ostensibly as refugees. Their mission was to report on the internal activities of the Social Democratic party. After serving the party diligently in Frankfurt, Günter Guillaume was appointed to the chancellor's office in 1969 and subsequently became a personal aide to Mr Brandt. The Guilllaumes accompanied the Brandts on holiday to Norway in 1973, and Günter Guillaume dealt with the receipt and despatch of all messages between the chancellor and his office in Bonn. As to Renate Lutze, she provided her East German masters with a steady flow of West Germany's (and Nato's) defence secrets.

The West German government has repeatedly said that Mr Guillaume would not be pardoned. It was not, it explained, influenced by feelings of revenge, but would keep this particular spy behind bars as a deterrent to others. Now Mr Guillaume is ill with kidney trouble, and would anyway be able to apply for remission next year after completing two thirds of his sentence. His wife was swapped last March.

There are important political considerations behind the deal. Both German nations have expressed an interest in resuming the inter-German dialogue, and Mr Schmidt is to visit the East German leader, Mr Erich Honecker, early next year. Mr Honecker has indicated that he may be prepared to make some "humanitarian concessions". In return he wants Mr Schmidt's government to conclude without fuss a new agreement to help finance East Germany's trade with West Germany. Swapping spies, if an even deal, could have been one way of preparing the ground. But this apparently lopsided exchange may not portend hard bargaining by Mr Schmidt.